

## LIFE'S LITTLE HURDLES



Hurdles are an advanced challenge. They make a good next step after Agility Ladders. To clear a hurdle, participants must lift their knees high. High knee lifts increase step length but are a greater balance challenge. The fall risk and length of time spent on one leg is greater with higher knee lifts. Two stepping patterns are used here: sidestepping and heel-toe stepping over the hurdles.

### ***Benefits »***

- ⦿ Improves mobility and agility.
- ⦿ Improves leg strength and range of motion.
- ⦿ Increases stride length and step height.
- ⦿ Facilitates heel-toe motion.
- ⦿ Facilitates preplanning.
- ⦿ Practices momentum control.

### ***Set It Up »***

You will need four to eight hurdles. Look for brightly colored, lightweight hurdles that are no more than 4 to 6 inches (10-15 centimeters) tall. Most hurdles can be set flat or high. Ease participants into hurdles by starting with the flat side down until they are familiar with the tasks.

### ***How to Do It »***

#### ***Sidestep Over One Hurdle***

Participants will sidestep over a hurdle, one foot at a time, and then step back. Tell them to leave enough room for both feet on each side of the hurdle.

- ⦿ Remind participants they will be using the tactics of Plan Ahead, Belly Button Training, and Knee Lift, Abs In as they step over the hurdles.
  - Plan Ahead means think of useful tactics and step wide enough so there is room for both feet when side stepping.
  - Belly Button means their belly follows the moving foot.
  - Knee Lift, Abs In will help them keep stability when lifting knees.
- ⦿ Here are some cues to use for sidestepping over the hurdles.
  - Master one hurdle first.
  - Knee lift and step over with one foot (plan to step far enough to make room for the other foot).
  - Transfer your weight (and belly button) to that side and foot.
  - Move the other foot over and get stable (stand tall with abs braced and ribs lifted).
  - Don't make the next move until you're ready.
  - Knee lift, step over, transfer weight, feet together, and stabilize.
  - Repeat until you find a rhythm for stepping over and back.
  - See how much the knee lift helps?
  - Did thinking about Belly Button Training help?

### ***Sidestep Over Several Hurdles (Flat-Side Down)***

Place four to six hurdles in a row, about 18 inches (46 centimeters) apart, flat side down. The goal is to sidestep over the flat-side down hurdles, one at a time to start. (Think Step and Stop, see page 237.)

- ⊙ Let participants figure out their footwork on their own.
- ⊙ Encourage them to find a pattern and use a rhythm.
- ⊙ Use the following cues.
  - Step one foot over, feel the weight transfer, and bring over the other foot.
  - Step, together, step, stop. (One hurdle cleared.)
  - Step, together, step, stop. (Next hurdle cleared.)
  - Posture check—are you standing tall and stable?
- ⊙ If you need to act as a spotter, stand behind the participant and hold their wrists.



### ***Sidestep Over Tall Hurdles***

Turn the hurdles tall-side up.

- ⊙ Participants sidestep over the hurdles, one at a time, just like the previous activity (step, together, step, stop).
- ⊙ Cue higher knee lifts and weight-transfer awareness (Belly Button transfers).
- ⊙ Connect more steps.
- ⊙ Cue good posture.
- ⊙ Cue pattern and rhythm.
- ⊙ Add more balance by connecting more steps and using shorter steps.

### ***Heel-Toe Walking Over Hurdles***

Instead of sidestepping across hurdles, participants will step perpendicularly over the hurdles in a heel-toe manner. Their goal is to clear each hurdle using a rolling heel-toe foot motion. Your job is to help them discover how best to do that. Practicing previously learned skills in a new environment is a way of linking new learning to older learning. Here are a few suggestions worth reviewing to help facilitate success at hurdles: Knee lifts, foot flexion, and Belly Button Training.

- ⊙ Knee lift: Training for knee lifts helps with both step height and step length. The knee lifting activities practiced previously might be helpful (Knee Lift, Abs In; Marching in Place; and Rock Forward, Knee Lift). Practice some good knee lifts before starting these hurdles.



- ⊙ Foot flexion: As they lift the forward-stepping leg, cue them to flex that foot. This readies the foot to clear the hurdle (not snag it) and to land, prepared to roll from heel to toe. Practice knee lift with foot flexion.
- ⊙ Belly Button Training: These techniques also may help participants clear hurdles. Once they put their foot down, they need to move over it. The momentum of moving forward will help generate the next step, and the next, and so on. Practice knee lift, foot flexion, and Belly Steps.

Head for the hurdles and do a row of them, maybe flat side down at first, then tall side up.

- ⊙ One participant crosses at a time, near a handrail or with you holding their hands.
- ⊙ Slow but with cadence works best: knee lift, belly step, knee lift, belly step.
- ⊙ Can you get them to look ahead?

### **Give It More Balance »**

- ⊙ Move the hurdles a little farther apart.
- ⊙ Add a few more hurdles.
- ⊙ Play some music.

### **Keep It Safe »**

Participants should take turns. You should stay close, hold their hands, and talk them through the activity.

### **Live It »**

Life's Little Hurdles can be fun *and* they improve agility and gait. Practice variations in gait and agility challenges using various patterns and rhythms.